



Blossomy Cottage

MONTANYE PERRY



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"You saw all that in one fell glance as we whizzed by?" he queried

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BY
MONTANYE PERRY



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MULE AND YOU'RE AS STUB-
BORN AS AN OLD ONE!".....Facing page 102

CHAPTER I

“**O** JOHN, John! There it is—stop the car, quick!”

“Eh—er—what?” stammered John, dazedly.

“There—back there—all ready for us. O, do stop the car!”

With one hand Gertrude was clutching John’s coat sleeve desperately; with the other she was waving frantic appeal to the conductor whose eyes were fixed in another direction. John came to his senses and his feet at the same instant. His short, quick whistle brought immediate response—the car stopped with a jar.

“Sorry, sir,” the conductor volunteered as John helped Gertrude down. “Hadn’t no idea you wanted to stop—thought you were going on to Eastham.”

“I thought so, too,” returned John, amiably, “but my wife—that is—we changed our minds suddenly.”

“Yes, sir; married man myself,” confided the conductor as his car moved off.

John stood in the hot, dusty road staring blankly after the car.

"It's almost sunset, now, and it looks like rain, and we've had no dinner, and there won't be any way of getting home by steam cars from here. We'll have to trolley back and not get home till morning," he said, patiently, "but I suppose none of that matters. Would you mind telling me what we got off here for, Gertrude? I'm not criticizing, you understand. I'm merely curious."

"Don't be a goose!" She tucked her arm in his and began pulling him back along the road they had come. "Aren't we out looking for a cottage that we can rent? And didn't I just see the darlinest little house with hollyhocks along the fence and hydrangeas by the path and a well by the kitchen door and a big tree by the gate and a place for a garden, and lots of grapevines, and all the windows boarded up—"

She paused for breath, and John stared at her with unfeigned amazement.

"You saw all that in one fell glance as we whizzed by?" he queried. "Talk about an eye for details! How many rooms has your house, and are there plenty of closets and a dry

cellar? Where was I all the time that I didn't see this wonderful spot?"

"Mooning about something, with your eyes half shut," she declared so lightly that the man beside her never suspected how her heart was aching over his white, strained face and tired eyes. "It's just around this little bend in the road—there, see it, John?"

"By Jove, Gertrude—it does look good!"

The rains of many summers had washed the cottage into a dull, pleasing shade of red. Hydrangea bushes bloomed along the little path and a row of stately hollyhocks were lifting their tall spurs proudly above the weeds that filled the garden. Behind it a field of yellowing grain stretched upward in a smooth gentle slope, to meet a fringe of woods where the sun was sinking now. The picket fence at the front shut in a wide patch of grass, knee-high, through which a few asters and cosmos had poked their heads.

"No one has been living here this summer, that's certain," John said. "We ought to be able to get it cheap, for nobody's going to rent such a place at this time of year. It isn't big enough for anything more than a chicken farm, anyhow."

"We'll have chickens, next spring," Gertrude decided, briskly. "But there'll be plenty to do this fall getting things cleared up and mending the gates and fixing the barn and—and—things like that," she finished, vaguely.

"There will be all I'm equal to doing," John said, and at the little note of bitterness that crept into his tone she clasped his arm more tightly.

"We're both going to rest," she said. "We both need it. Think how lovely these hills are with the woods all red and yellow and orange and green and purple—"

"Hold on, hold on," he interrupted, "you're getting Mother Nature all mixed up with the futuristic artists. Who ever saw a purple tree, young lady?"

"Don't be so literal," she scoffed. But the bitterness was gone from John's voice and she was content.

They unfastened the loose-hinged gate and poked about like two adventurous children. A grapevine on the south side of the lot hung heavy with ripening clusters. There were two apple trees, and the ground beneath them was red with the fallen fruit.

"I can make grape jelly, and quarts and

quarts of apple sauce," Gertrude cried, happily. "O, let's find the man who owns it, quick, and get the keys so we can go inside and see what's there too."

"It must belong to those folks." John nodded toward a big, comfortable-looking house, some distance up the road. "This lot seems to be cut out of the corner of their farm. Probably intended the cottage for some man who worked for them. I'll just run up there and inquire. You sit here in the shade."

"Let me go instead of you," she begged. "Probably the men won't be there and I want to ask the woman all about the house and everything—I'll find out a lot of things that a man never would think of, if you'll let me go alone. And I'll get the rent cheaper—I'm used to hunting bargains, you know."

"All right, honey." He dropped on the steps, loyally helping her to keep up the brave pretense of not noticing his utter fatigue. "I'll just sit here and eat about seven of these apples—and if they invite you to dinner you'd better stay."

"They don't have dinner at this time of day in the country. They have supper. And if they ask me, I shall certainly stay, and

smuggle something away for you too. So don't eat too many apples."

With a gay nod she was off toward the big white house, which looked very cool and inviting with its broad sweep of green lawn hemmed by a neatly trimmed hedge. Its attractiveness increased as she drew nearer. The gravel path that led up to the front door was bordered with huge clam shells that had been whitewashed and set edge to edge in a prim, pleasing row. The stones that framed the huge, circular flower beds were whitewashed too, and the foundations of all the outbuildings had been treated to the same cleanly bath.

"It's all so spick and span," she thought as she went up the steps and tapped lightly on the screen door. "I look frightfully dirty and mussed up—what if they decide that I need a coat of whitewash too!"

"Come in!" a woman's deep, pleasant voice called from somewhere within, and after an instant's hesitation Gertrude obeyed, stepping into a cool rag-carpeted hall. "Come right out here. We're eating supper," the voice came again, and again Gertrude obeyed, following the voice across a big, cheerful sitting-

room, through an orderly dining room with table and sideboard swathed in pink mosquito-bar, until she stopped in the doorway of a kitchen where a man and woman were eating at a round table covered with the gayest of red and white checked cloths.

"Land sakes!" the woman cried, getting up hastily, "you'll have to excuse me! I never thought of it being a stranger—I thought it was just one of the neighbors. I'm real mortified!"

"You needn't be," Gertrude smiled, "because you see I'm trying to be one of your neighbors—that's what I came for. I want to know if we, my husband and I, can rent the little cottage down there on the corner of your farm."

"It don't belong to us." The woman was looking at Gertrude with a puzzled expression. She had a plump, comfortable face, but her eyes had a certain shrewdness mingled with their kindliness as if with all her good nature she was not lightly to be taken in nor imposed upon. Her appraising gaze was softening already under the eager trustfulness of Gertrude's eyes.

"O, I'm so sorry," Gertrude spoke impulsively. "I'd love to rent a house of you—but

maybe you can tell me about it, and where I could see the owner."

"It's old Jim Bennett's. His land joins ours, but his house is 'way on up the road, a good quarter of a mile, over the hill. He owns more land than anybody else in this county. He built that little house for his help, but he never could get nobody to work for him and live in it. A month's the longest any man ever works for him unless he gets some stranger and signs 'em up to a paper to work all summer and not get any pay till the harvesting's done."

"Then you think we could rent it?"

"Jim Bennett'd rent his own heart out if he got his rent in advance. But s'pose you tell us just what you want it for—can't anyone make a living there, you know."

"My husband is ill—a nervous breakdown. We haven't much money, but we must live in the country where it is quiet and restful and John must be out of doors—"

Her voice failed suddenly. All the long week she had journeyed gayly by John's side, scorning fatigue, fighting down her haunting fears, pretending not to see the whiteness of the loved face, the weariness of the dear eyes.

Now out of John's sight her strength and courage ebbed in a flash—how could she put her burden into words?

"There, there, child! Don't talk about it. I see how it is." Was ever stranger-touch so gentle, stranger-voice so kind? "Sit down here in my rocker and rest a little, and then we'll see about it. Ed, you bring a cup of that hot tea."

"You better put her right up here to the table to have a good supper. She's clear tuckered out and she needs something besides tea, I reckon."

It was the first time that the man had spoken. He was regarding the two women indulgently, with a twinkle in his eyes that matched the note of quizzical humor in his voice. Now he proceeded to place a chair and to arrange an extra plate, while his wife hovered over Gertrude with motherly pats and words.

"I'm an old goose," she said, "not to have set you right straight down to supper in the first place. It takes Ed to think of the practical things to do for a body, every time. You don't realize you're hungry, but you are just the same. Ed, you bring out that cold chicken

and run down cellar after a bottle of strawberry jam—young folks like sweet things. There, that's right. Now, while you eat your supper Ed will go up to Bennett's and get the key to the cottage and make him set a reasonable price on it—if you went yourself he'd ask you more for a year's rent than the whole thing's worth."

"But I can't make you so much trouble," Gertrude protested, weakly. "I'm a perfect stranger and you don't know anything about us, and—"

"I know enough about you—I can read faces as well as most anybody, I reckon, and you're not a stranger, any more. You're goin' to be my nearest neighbor."

"You're so good to me," sighed Gertrude. "We've looked and looked for a place and I was getting so tired and discouraged. You see we've only six hundred dollars and the doctor says John must have complete rest for a year at least."

"Plenty enough, if you use it sensibly," was the confident reply. "But where'd you come from just now, child? You're not out here from the city all alone?"

"O, no. John's over there at the cottage,

waiting for me. I caught a glimpse of the place from the trolley car, so we got off."

"Ed," said the woman, "hurry along to Bennett's, and stop and tell that young man over to the cottage that his Aunt Vic's got pretty near a whole cold chicken up here, and his wife's eating it all up. He'd better hurry."

CHAPTER II

“**D**O you fink they’ll be here very, very soon now, Aunt Betty?”

“No doubt of it, honey-boy. Father said ‘Home for dinner to-morrow,’ you know. And to-day’s to-morrow, and the dinner hour draweth near, and so, I’m sure, do father and mummy.”

“Wasn’t it a funny telegram that father sent us! Let’s read it again, Aunt Betty.”

She watched the child fondly as he slipped from the chair, leaving his fairy-book face downward on the rug. He was a sturdy five-year-old with a cloud of red-gold curls which he was forever shaking away from his serious brown eyes.

“Here it is,” he said, bringing the yellow slip as eagerly as if for its first reading. He pointed a square little forefinger at each word as he read slowly: ‘Eureka! Staying all night with Aunt Vic. Home for dinner to-morrow.’”

“And ‘Eureka’ means ‘I’ve found it’—and that means that they’ve found a place to live

where father can get well. Who d' you s'pose Aunt Vic is?"

"That's the question, little one. But we'll soon know. Some nice old lady, probably, who has fallen in love with your mummy's blue eyes—or maybe with your father's big brown ones."

"Aunt Vic—Aunt Vic," the child mused, perched on the arm of Betty's chair, one sandaled foot rubbing her white skirts, un-reproved. "It sounds nice—but, of course, she's nice if she's an aunt. She couldn't be an aunt-lady and be horrid!"

With a shake of the red-gold thatch he smiled up at her, and suddenly, with one impulsive movement she swept him into her lap, holding him close, looking down into his astonished eyes through a haze of hot tears.

"O, Jackie-boy," she half-sobbed, "how can I ever let you go? What will Aunt Betty do without her boy?"

For a moment the child's eyes stared curiously, uncomprehendingly—and in that moment there were steps in the hallway, the door of the living room opened, and a man and woman entered crying joyously, "Hello, Betty dear! Hello, Jackie-boy—we're back!"

✧ But there was no flash of white-stockinged legs toward the doorway, no eager little face uplifted, no ecstatic childish cry of welcome. Jack was standing stiff and straight, one tiny hand grasping Aunt Betty's sleeve, the other, with square fore-finger extended, pointing straight at the astonished new comers.

"What does Aunt Betty mean?" he demanded, accusingly. "What does she mean? She said 'How can I ever let you go?' She said"—the little voice was trembling into sobs, "'What will Aunt Betty do without her boy?' We're not going to the country and leave Aunt Betty here, are we? Why, we couldn't—"

Above the bright head three pairs of eyes met in anxious, shocked questioning. Betty was sobbing softly.

"I didn't mean to, Gertrude," she whispered. "It just slipped out. But, anyhow, he's got to know some time."

"What did she mean—what did she?" There was a panic of fear in the little voice now. The man caught his breath sharply.

"Tell him, Gertrude," he said. "Let's get it over."

"Listen, dear." The mother knelt, her arms around the rigid little body, her blue, brood-

ing eyes looking straight into the brown ones where the tears lay heavy on the curling lashes. "Let mummy explain all about it. You know Aunt Betty lived here with us and went to the big college so that she would be able to teach little boys and girls. She studied and worked for four whole years, just for that. Now she has graduated, and of course she must begin her work. She can't go to the country to live with us because she must stay here and teach school. But she will come out to see us very often, and sometimes father will bring you in to visit her—"

But Jack could bear no more. With a wailing cry he flung himself, face downward, on the rug, kicking his sandaled toes into it furiously. For once, no stern parental command stopped the demonstration.

"I won't have her come to see us!" he shrieked. "I won't come to visit her! You don't visit your very own fambly—you live with 'em all the time, every day! You scolded me 'cause I said we could put the basement cat out and let it find a home for itself. Aunt Betty's worth more'n ten hundred million old cats!"

"Mummy has found a nice home for Aunt

Betty with a lovely lady who will be good to her," Gertrude began helplessly. "She has to stay here, dear, to teach the little boys and girls."

"*Why* does she? Why can't she teach school out in the country with us? Aren't there any little boys and girls out there to be taught?"

Betty was sitting flat on the floor now, her hands caressing Jack's bright hair. Like a flash, she lifted her head, her blue eyes shining through her tears.

"O, John—Gertrude!" she cried, eagerly. "Maybe Jackie-boy's found the way! O, you don't suppose, do you, that there *could* be a school out there they'd let me teach?"

"There's a schoolhouse at the Corners, not fifteen minutes walk from our cottage," Gertrude declared hopefully. "O, John, do you suppose—"

"Betty and I will go out there on the first car to-morrow morning and see about it," John decided with characteristic briskness. "To think that such a thing never occurred to our benighted minds! It takes a kid to go straight to the root of a matter. Jack, get up immediately. Do you know what father does

when you throw yourself down and kick like that?"

"Don't do it this time," begged Betty, holding the culprit closer. "He kicked such a lovely idea! Jack, ask father and mummy please to excuse your bad temper this once, and we'll go and wash our faces and be ready to hear about Aunt Vic and all the rest of it."

"Don't set both your baby hearts on it too fondly," warned Gertrude. "The school may be engaged."

"And again, Betty may be engaged," John said, thoughtfully, as Betty led Jack away. "What do you suppose James Monroe will say to the idea of Betty going off to the country for a year?"

CHAPTER III

"HERE comes Mr. Monroe," announced Jack.

Dinner was over at Hope House, but the family was lingering in the dining room when a step in the hall was followed by Jack's announcement.

"You've a great ear for footsteps, son," John said.

"I don't know his footstep," the child explained, conscientiously. "I just know Aunt Betty's face. When her eyes get shiny like that and her cheeks get pinky-rose, I know it's Mr. Monroe coming."

Betty's face buried its "pinky-rosiness" in the red-gold curls as John and Gertrude shouted appreciation of Jack's astuteness. James Monroe, pausing in the doorway, took in the picture with appreciative eyes.

Gertrude hospitably pushed a chair forward. "Come and hear the news," she said. "We've found a house—just the dearest place!"

"With flowers and apple trees, and a brook

for me to fish in, and a schoolhouse for Aunt Betty to teach in!" Jack exulted, leaning comfortably against the newcomer's knee.

"For Aunt Betty to teach in!"

"Yes—and I thought of that all myself! You see I've had Aunt Betty all my life, and I couldn't do without her now, could I?"

"Come on, Jackie-boy," Gertrude said. Her woman-heart read the distress in James Monroe's eyes. "It's your bedtime. Father is going to help me put you to bed, and Aunt Betty can tell Mr. Monroe all about Rosevale."

"Rosevale—pretty name. Where is the place?" Monroe asked as Jack said a lengthy good-night to Aunt Betty.

"Must be thirty or forty miles, due west," John answered with the true New Yorker's indefiniteness about any place more remote than The Bronx. "And there's a dandy State road all the way," he added as a happy afterthought.

"O, John," Gertrude whispered as Jack's sturdy figure bounded up the stairs ahead of them, "*do* you suppose he will persuade her not to go with us?"

"I do not!" he replied, with conviction. "She's made up her mind to teach for two

years, and she's got a chin just like her elder sister's. Anyhow," he added, continuing the conversation after Jack was tucked into bed, "I hardly think Monroe will object to Rosevale for Betty. Notice his eyes light up when I mentioned the good roads? What's a few miles to a man with a car like his?"

"Well," Gertrude sighed contentedly, "it would be awfully nice. I'm not mercenary, but he has such a fine business—and I am perfectly sure that Betty cares for him."

Downstairs, James Monroe, for the first time, was perfectly sure that Betty cared for him. She was close in the circle of his arm, and there were traces of tears on her cheeks, but the blue eyes were shining brighter than Jack had ever seen them.

"Since you will serve out the term of your bondage," he said, "I'd rather it was in the country than here. But *why* won't you marry me now?"

"Because," said Betty, "as I must have said a million times before, I received free tuition from the State Normal College by signing an agreement to teach two years in this State after my graduation."

"But I'd pay them the amount of your

tuition, you know. O, well," as the Bancroft chin lifted proudly, "we won't quarrel about it any more! Out there in the country I'll know that you are all right. It won't be the frazzling, nerve-racking thing that city school teaching is. And think of all the week-ends!"

CHAPTER IV

“**N**OW, who’s that coming up the meadow path?”

Aunt Vic shaded her eyes with her hand and peered sharply at the pair who were coming, hand in hand, across the daisied field in the glare of the August sun.

“It’s strangers, Ed. I declare, life is getting real exciting with strangers every day! This is a young lady and a little boy. Come and look at ’em. What a ’cute little tyke he is! Just see them red curls shine in the sun, and he wants to stop to pick every single daisy in the field. Who do you suppose it is?”

“I reckon it’s that Mr. Drake’s sister-in-law and his little boy that they told about,” Uncle Ed answered in his quiet way. “She looks like Mis’ Drake—that is she walks like her. Didn’t you notice how Mis’ Drake carried her head—kinda like she had a crown on it? And this girl tilts hers just the same way—see?”

“You’re always so noticing, Ed.” Aunt Vic’s tone was proudly approving. “I’ll bet

that's just who it is. We'd better go and meet them. It looks more hospitable—the young lady might feel sort of shy.”

If Betty felt any shyness, it was dispelled the instant she caught sight of the two, waiting for her in the shade of a big maple. She went straight to Aunt Vic, holding up her face, like a child, to be kissed.

“I’m Betty,” she said, “and this is Jack. And we know that you are Aunt Vic and Uncle Ed.”

“Well, you’re two happy-looking children!” Aunt Vic beamed on them, impartially. “Come right in and get cooled off. It’s dreadful hot in the sun, and of course, you’re hungry, aren’t you, Jack?”

“Father *said* you had a great big cooky jar, and lots of strawberry jam!” said Jack, blissfully.

“Come on in the house,” invited Aunt Vic. “I’m getting dinner. Mr. Drake’s no worse, I hope?”

“Not worse, exactly, but very tired after his trip, so I coaxed them to let us come alone. You see,” Betty explained, “I want to teach the school out here. Do you know whether it is engaged for this year?”

Aunt Vic gazed at the eager face doubtfully.

"I don't know—they're looking for a teacher, but—"

Uncle Ed shook his head soberly.

"I wish you could have it," he said, "but you see there's three directors—Win Thornton, myself, and old Jim Bennett, the one that owns the cottage. Now Win would be all right; but it's got to be a unanimous consent, and Bennett's dead set against everything and everybody that comes from the city. If we'd only known this yesterday he might have consented for the sake of renting his cottage—but now the lease is signed I'm afraid there's no hope. But I'll get Win and the two of us will go over to Bennett's and see what we can do."

"O, thank you," began Betty; but Jack, who had been listening anxiously, interrupted.

"O, no!" he cried. "Scuse me, Aunt Betty, but I *have* to interrupt. You see," turning an eager face up to Uncle Ed, "I know all about Aunt Betty and you've only just seen her once. You must let her go and ask the man—nobody ever says 'No' to Aunt Betty!"

"There's generally a lot of sense to a child's suggestions, if folks will just listen to them,"

declared Aunt Vic when their laughter had subsided. "Now, what I say is, let Ed see Win this afternoon, and then about six o'clock, when Bennett has got in from the fields, let Betty and Jack go over there alone. Maybe the old man's got a heart hid away somewhere. Who knows?"

So at six o'clock Betty walked up the narrow lane that led from the road to the Bennett farmyard, with Jack clinging to her hand.

"It doesn't look like Uncle Ed's farm," Jack said, critically. "He hasn't any nice flower beds and the grass is all humpy and nothing is painted white. Maybe if he'd fix up nice he wouldn't be so cross."

"Hush, dear," Betty cautioned hastily. "That must be Mr. Bennett coming from the barn."

Her cheeks were more than pinky-rose now; they were crimson as the old man approached, peering at her over a pair of iron-rimmed spectacles.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded, sharply. "I don't want to buy anything. I suppose you're selling some article that a farmer can't get along without, such as a complete biography of Napoleon Bonaparte. But I can't

buy it, even to help you pay your college bills."

In spite of her nervousness, Betty laughed.

"I have nothing to sell," she said, "and I'm through college with all my bills paid, fortunately. That's what I came to see you about," plunging straight to her point. "I am through college and I want to teach school—your school!"

"Teach our school!" His amazement was genuine. "A slip of a girl like you—you ain't twenty!"

"I'm twenty-two," corrected Betty. "I'm Mrs. Drake's sister—you know they rented your cottage. And I want to live with my sister, as I always have, and—"

"There's enough said," the harsh voice interrupted. "Of course it would be very fine for you, but what we're looking for is a good, capable teacher that can drive some sense into the young ones' heads. City girls don't know anything practical. We can't give you the school just because you'd enjoy living with your sister. Business is business, young lady, and anybody can see that you're not fit to teach a country school."

"You'd just better stop that! I won't have

anybody talk so to my Aunt Betty! You're making her cry! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, a big man like you!"

Heedless of Betty's detaining hand, Jack sprang forward, planting himself directly before the old man, while his brown eyes blazed into the frowning face that towered above him.

For a moment the deep-set eyes glared into the brown ones. Then the frowning face relaxed. The old man actually gave a dry chuckle.

"You're a spunky one," he said. "Maybe I was a mite hasty, but I'm all upset. I smashed my finger just now in a stone wall, see?"

He held up his right hand, rudely bandaged. Jack's anger was forgotten at once.

"O, I'm so sorry," he cried. "It must hurt awful. Let Aunt Betty fix it for you. She knows how to fix a hurt finger 'zactly right."

"That's to her credit." To Betty's amazement, he flashed her a grim smile. "But it isn't the finger that frets me so. It's the fact that I've got three of the best Jersey cows in the State that ought to be milked this minute, and I can't do it with my right hand all crippled up."

"I've spent every vacation of my life on my uncle's dairy farm," declared Betty, eagerly. "I know how to milk—where are the cows?"

"You!" he exclaimed with amused contempt in his tone. "You couldn't milk one cow, let alone three!"

"Just give me a chance. It can't do any harm to let me try. Let's hurry—it's past their milking time now."

If an artist could have caught the expression of dazed amazement on old Jim Bennett's face when Betty, her white skirts deftly tucked around her, seated herself on a three-legged stool and, with a gentle word and pat for the beautiful, sleek Jersey, began to bring a steady, abundant stream of milk into the pail, his fortune and eternal fame would have been assured.

"Well I'll be bob-whizzled!" was his only comment.

The expression was still there when the last of the three cows had moved away, browsing contentedly, and Betty rose and smilingly faced him.

Her color had lessened, her breath was not quite steady. Glancing at her bare, slender

arms, the old man knew that she must be utterly fatigued.

"Come up and set on my porch and rest yourself off," he commanded, "and I'll hitch up and take you back to wherever you came from. You can teach our school for the next twenty years for all of me. I guess the young ones will learn plenty of sensible things from you. Why, half the girls around here think it's beneath them to milk a cow!"

Half an hour afterward the old buggy rattled down the hill, past the little cottage, while Jack, sitting between Betty and old Bennett, chattered happily.

"Well, Miss Betty, remember school begins the first Monday in September," admonished the old man as he deposited them at Aunt Vic's door.

"I'll be on time," promised Betty.

"I bet she will," he chuckled as the buggy rattled up the hill. "Think of it—three full-sized cows! A slip of a girl full of city talk and ways—and her chin a-tilting up just as chipper as ever when she'd got it done!"

"Jack was right," Aunt Vic declared when she had found her tongue after the shock of seeing them dismount from the ancient buggy.

"If you can get around Jim Bennett, it proves that nobody can say no to you."

"Aunt Betty could coax up crosser folks than old Bennett!" declared Jack.

CHAPTER V

HE repeated the remark the following evening, nestling in Aunt Betty's arms while she gaily described their adventures to the home folk.

"You mustn't say 'old Bennett,'" she admonished.

"What's the old fellow's full name?"

It was James Monroe who put the question, and something in his tone caused Gertrude, the observant, to glance closely at his face.

"James M. Bennett—it's painted across the front of the barn," Betty answered.

"Just where did you say Rosevale is, John?" Again Gertrude caught the curious note in his voice.

"I said thirty or forty miles due west, but as a matter of fact it is fifty-five miles, north-west. I looked it up to-day. Why? Know anyone out there?"

"It used to be called Bennett's Corners," said Betty before Monroe could answer. "Aunt

Vic said so. She said that five years ago, when they got the post office there and the trolley came through, some of the younger generation got up a petition and had the post office and the station named Rosevale, and that was about the last straw for the old man."

Another glance at Monroe's face and Gertrude arose.

"Come on, John and Jack," she decreed. "It's time for small boys and invalids to be in bed."

"I'm going out to Rosevale to-morrow and stay three days and get the cottage all cleaned up. Aunt Vic's going to find me a scrub-lady to help," Betty began gleefully, when Jack had said a reluctant good night; "and if you want to be very nice, you may come out in the car and bring me home. Then you can see Blossomy Cottage for yourself."

She expected enthusiastic assent, but to her surprise, he shook his head.

"Betty, dear," he said, gently, "I want you to change your mind and marry me right away."

"Now, don't begin that again," she pouted. "We had that all settled once."

"I know, but I can't have you go to Rose-

vale. I'll get you the prettiest little home in this city, dear—anything you want—”

But Betty was growing impatient. She interrupted decisively:

“I don't know why you are so changeable. I've said that I love you, and I do. I said that I'd marry you in two years if you wanted to wait, and you agreed. I'm not capricious nor fickle. If you're tired of your bargain so soon, it isn't my fault.”

“But you don't understand—there are reasons.”

“How are things any different than they were last night?”

“I can't tell you, dear. Can't you trust me when I say that I can't explain? I can never go to Rosevale.”

She stared at him, bewildered. His face was very white now. Around his mouth, firm lines were showing—lines she never had noticed before. His eyes, with all their tenderness, were unyielding. To the impulsive, untried girl-woman it seemed that her lover had vanished and a stranger had stepped into his place.

Puzzled, angry, desperately hurt, she drew away from him, her head lifted proudly.

"If you choose to refuse to live up to our agreement for some caprice which you won't even explain, you may do so of course. I am going to teach in Rosevale and live at Blossomy Cottage. Will you come to see me?"

"No, Betty dear."

The very quietness of the words spoke finality. With a little gasp the girl whirled and ran straight past his outstretched arms, across the hall, up the stairs to her own room, where she flung herself down on the dainty bed, sobbing stormily.

Below there was silence for a long, long time, it seemed to Betty. Then she heard the outer door close.

"He's gone!" she whispered. "He'll never come back. I don't care—I don't care one little bit!" She fell to sobbing again, forlornly.

Some one had said "No" to Aunt Betty.

CHAPTER VI

“I’M going to have supper all ready when she comes. It’s early, but she will be tired and hungry. I know she’ll be too excited to eat her luncheon.”

Gertrude was setting the supper table in Blossomy Cottage as she talked. It looked very pretty, with the bowl of black-eyed Susans in the center, the jars of feathery golden-rod nodding in the breeze from the open windows, the late afternoon sun filtering through the muslin curtains to lie in creamy splotches on the brown-painted floor.

“That’s good,” approved John. He was carefully arranging slices of luscious red tomatoes on a bed of crisp lettuce leaves. “There! I call that a work of art. Is the mayonnaise ready?”

“Yes. Set the whole thing in the ice box till she comes. O, John, isn’t everything beautiful! Don’t you just love Blossomy Cottage?”

He held her gently for a moment, looking down into the clear blue of her eyes. What

he saw there seemed to satisfy him, for he gave a little sigh of relief.

"I've wondered, a bit, if you were just pretending to be so happy," he confessed. "You've worked so hard, and it is all so different from the life to which you are accustomed."

"You goose!" the blue eyes laughed through a quick mist, "of course it's different. That's why I like it. Why, sometimes I'm almost wicked enough to be glad you were sick, now that you're getting well so fast."

"Here's some blackberries Aunt Vic sent for our supper," came Jack's voice from the doorway, "and this pail is full of cream. I helped pick the berries and weeded the onion bed, and the cream is my wages—Uncle Ed said so."

"Is there anything for supper that our neighbors didn't contribute?" asked John, as he took the offerings from Jack's careful grasp.

"Yes—the tea!" laughed Gertrude. "Well, Aunt Vic declares that their garden is just full of things going to waste because they can't use them. Next year we will have a garden—a big, big one."

"May I go to meet Aunt Betty now?"

"Yes, but listen, dear. You mustn't begin to ask questions as soon as you meet her. You know it is Aunt Betty's very first day of school and she will be tired. Maybe some of the boys and girls were naughty and made her feel discouraged. Just kiss her and tell her that mummy has supper all ready, and don't make her talk if she doesn't feel like it."

"O, I know," nodded Jack. "I can tell when Aunt Betty wants to be quiet. Why, lots of nights when we go up the hill to watch the sun set I sit in her lap and she puts her head down against mine, and I feel tears on my hair just as plain! But I don't say a word—not since the first time, 'cause she said it isn't because she is unhappy, but just because she's so glad she's got me. I spect she remembers how mummy tried to find her a home, just like the basement cat!"

"Run along, son; you'll be late," said John, hastily; and as Jack's curls bobbed down the path he took Gertrude in his arms. "There, there, dear, you mustn't cry! You mustn't worry so about her. A few tears and quiet thoughts won't hurt the girl. She will fight out her own battle and in the end be all the better for it."

"Do you really think so? It breaks my heart to see her pretend to be so gay, and all the time her eyes are so wistful. And I know she half expects him every Saturday night. She puts on her prettiest dress—and tries to act unconcerned!"

"Well, she needn't expect him. He won't come. James Monroe isn't a man to say one thing and do another."

"But *why* won't he come?"

"I don't know. He stated plainly to me that he could not come out here and that he could not explain. I don't pretend to understand; but no man suffers as it was perfectly evident that he was suffering, for a mere whim. I have faith in him and in Betty. They love each other, and in the end they'll work out their problems and be happy."

"I wish I could feel as sure as you do," sighed Gertrude. "O, there she comes! Get the things from the ice box while I make the tea!"

"Aunt Betty isn't tired a bit," Jack announced, joyously. "All the boys and girls are good. They brought her flowers and apples and a great big peach. I wish I could teach school."

"I know I'm going to enjoy it," said Betty, as she ate her supper with the appetite which Gertrude had prophesied; "but one thing puzzles me—my pupils are all so young; the oldest one is fourteen. Why don't the older ones come to school?"

Neither John nor Gertrude could answer the question, so Betty repeated it to Aunt Vic when that lady came across the meadows "to see if the child's all tuckered out after her first day."

"I've thought about that a good bit myself, off and on," Aunt Vic declared. "Years ago there used to be big boys and girls in school in the winter time. But since they built the furniture factory over to Reedsport—that's only two mile from here, 'cross country—the boys can get work there; and soon's they're fourteen, so the school law won't touch 'em, they're off to the factory. And soon as they've worked there long enough to save up a little money, they're off to the city, most of them, where wages is better."

"But it seems as if there must be some people here who would like to have their children fitted for something besides factory work," said Betty.

"There's a few young folks around here that go to the high school in Galeton. They can go on the trolley cars; but that's pretty expensive, so there's only a few that gets to go."

"But the girls can't work in the furniture factory. Why don't they come to school?"

Aunt Vic smiled the comfortable, tolerant smile that comes with many years of sympathetic living.

"I suspect," she said, "that school's not so very interesting to girls of that age when none of the big boys go. You know, young folks will be young folks; and with all our talk about the pursuing male, I've noticed as I've watched life, that the females do a good share of the pursuing! I'll warrant that if Glen Fisher and Dave Dunning and a few others I could name should begin to go to school tomorrow, the girls around here would all wake up to a burning desire for an education soon's they heard of it."

"They should be in school." Betty grieved even while she laughed at Aunt Vic's reasoning.

"Well, don't begin to worry about the ones that don't come till you get used to the ones that do," advised Aunt Vic. "Young ones in

Rosevale lack quite a lot of being angels, same's other places, I expect."

"O, I'm sure that none of mine are bad," Betty defended her one-day family. "Just think of the wild urchins I've been accustomed to at Hope House."

"Betty," queried Aunt Vic, suddenly, "what did your brother-in-law do in the city?"

"Do? He was the head worker at Hope House. I wish you could have seen the boys there. They had a gymnasium, you know, and a base ball team, and athletics, and Boy Scouts, and—"

"I don't mean that," interrupted Aunt Vic; "I mean what was his *job*?"

"His job? That was his job—running Hope House. Of course there were things for the older folk, too—mothers' clubs, a cooking school, a civic club for the men, and lectures and social evenings."

Aunt Vic's face expressed unqualified wonder.

"Do you mean to say he got paid for doing things like that? Who paid him? Where'd they get the money? What was it all *for*?"

"It's what they call settlement work, or neighborhood work," Betty explained. "Hope

House was owned and financed by a wealthy church. It was a big, comfortable house in a poor section of the city. John and Gertrude made their home there—a regular home, you know. They made friends with their neighbors and tried to help them. John knew all the troubles and worries of every family in his district. And Gertrude could tell you the age, disposition, and ailments of every baby for blocks and blocks around. It was just making a regular business of being neighborly, don't you see?"

"Land sakes!" exclaimed Aunt Vic. "I've read about such things, but I never really sensed what it meant before. Making a business of being neighborly—well, well! No wonder his nerves all give out! Good night, child. I must go home and tell Ed about it. We've wondered what gave that pair their young-and-old look. That's it—mixing up with heaps of human joys and sorrows makes folks old and keeps 'em young, both at once!"

"That's true," whispered Betty to herself, watching Aunt Vic pick her way along the meadow path in the twilight. "Their work has made them young and old too—but they've got each other!" A tear splashed down on

her blue frock and she shook her head impatiently. "Why can't I be sensible—sentimentalizing over the past when I should be thinking of my new work! Somehow, I'm going to get those big boys and girls to come to school."

"You must go slowly," John warned her, when she asked his advice. "First get acquainted with your pupils and their parents. We must go to church and Sunday school. We will meet a good many of our neighbors there, I fancy."

"Now, you two folk can just stop!" interrupted Gertrude. "We came out here to rest, not to do neighborhood work. We're going to be just ordinary folk, attending strictly to our own affairs."

But, a few minutes later, Gertrude murmured half to herself, "There's plenty of room!" Then, in response to their inquiring glances, "I was thinking that Betty might like to ask the mothers of her pupils to come here some Saturday afternoon. We could have tea and maybe some of them would bring their babies. I do so want to hold a baby again and tell its mother all about what I did when Jack was a little baby!"

"Listen to the lady who came out here to rest!" cried John, gleefully, while Betty's laughter rang out. "She's trying to start a mothers' club!"

"O, no, not a club," protested Gertrude, weakly, "but I like to be friendly, and—and—" with sudden inspiration, "of course I am only doing it to help Betty! You know that, don't you, Betty?"

"I know that you're *dear!*" declared Betty, "and you shall have your babies and your mothers and no one shall laugh at you—not even John."

But after all, they decided to wait until school was well under way and then to have the mothers' club, as John insisted upon calling it, at the schoolhouse.

"I want the mothers to see the school and be interested in it," said Betty. "I'll ask them to come at three o'clock and then when school is dismissed we can have the tea and cakes. We'll take the teakettle and the dishes we need in a basket. The older children can pass things—they'll love it."

The neighborhood buzzed excitedly over the notes of invitation to Mothers' Day, carefully written by the children themselves. The gen-

eral sentiment finally crystallized in the words of Mrs. Dunning, mother of four of Betty's flock.

"The young ones just worship Miss Betty, as they call her. They'll cry their eyes out if I don't get ready and go. And when you come right down to it, why shouldn't we all be interested to go to see the school and the new teacher? No use shyin' off at a new idea, just because it comes from the city. Anyhow, anybody can see that she means well by it, and I sha'n't be one to hurt her feelings."

So the invitations were accepted and Betty's heart rejoiced. Fortunately for her peace of mind, she did not hear the neighborhood wonder, "What'll old Bennett have to say about a Mothers' Day when he hears of it?"

But to everyone's surprise, old Bennett said nothing. His grim lips set themselves a trifle more grimly when he heard of Mothers' Day, but he made no comment. And when, on the eventful afternoon, he hitched up and rattled off to the village store, passing the schoolhouse, no one guessed what was on his mind.

"Guess she won't be expecting me," he chuckled, as he drove back and tied his horse

to some bushes just out of sight of the school-house.

The schoolhouse door stood open. He walked up quietly and stopped, unnoticed. His sharp eyes widened with surprise.

To the mothers, whose women's eyes could see how the magic had been wrought, the dainty room was a revelation. To the man's bewildered gaze it seemed nothing short of miraculous!

During the summer vacation, the walls and ceiling had been newly plastered and finished with a coat of glaring whitewash, while the woodwork had been painted a dark brown. Now, walls and ceiling were tinted a rich, creamy shade that was restful to the eyes and harmonized pleasantly with the brown paint. Dainty muslin curtains softened the light from the six windows and the huge cupboard, where wraps and dinner pails were kept, was hidden by a curtain of soft brown.

That was all, except a few good photographs and prints, a plaster bust of Lincoln, jars of wild flowers and branches of brilliant autumn foliage; but the plain, unattractive room had been transformed.

The flat table which served as Betty's desk

had been covered with a white cloth, and there the brass kettle was cheerfully boiling over its alcohol flame. The mothers were drinking tea from dainty china cups. The children were proudly passing plates of cakes.

Half a dozen of the mothers were grouped around Gertrude Drake, as she sat on a low seat, a baby cuddled in each arm; and when one of them rose, as if to speak, the room quieted:

"That's Mis' Squire Knapp," thought the unsuspected observer, outside.

"I'd like to say to Miss Betty and to all of you, that I haven't enjoyed anything so much as this for years," she began. "It makes me ashamed now to think how little interest I have ever shown in our school. We want to know why we can't have the last Friday afternoon in every month for Mothers' Day, if for no other reason than because it's so nice to have our children learn to pass things around and behave pretty. Next time I'll bring the refreshments; and then some one else can have a turn. Now is Miss Betty willing for us to do this?"

"I shall be so very glad if you will," said Betty, her face alight with joy and pride.

"Then will every mother that's in favor of it please stand up?" asked "Mis' Squire Knapp"—wife of Rosevale's leading citizen.

And as every woman rose eagerly, the man who was watching withdrew, silently and hurriedly, to the shelter of the bushes that bordered the roadside where his horse waited.

"No use o' one man trying to argue with a parcel of women-folks," he muttered. "Where'd she get the money to fix that room? It must of cost a lot! The first chance I get, I'll ask her about it."

His chance came very soon. It was just after sunset that, sitting on the front porch of the rather dilapidated house in which he lived alone, he saw Betty coming up the lane.

"I'm so glad you're home," she declared. "I've just had an idea and I want to ask your advice."

She seated herself on the steps and smiled up at him in friendly fashion.

"You didn't ask my advice about making over the schoolhouse," he retorted.

"O, you've seen it!" she exclaimed.

"I—I—I just looked in as I was coming up from the store," he stammered.

"I'm so glad you like it," Betty said.

"I don't recall saying as I liked it!" he snapped. "I asked you where you got the money."

"O, the materials cost only three dollars. John and I did the work. I was glad to spend that much on my place of business—one doesn't expect a business to be all profit, you know."

"Hm-m-m. Do you call it necessary for the scholars to have a schoolhouse fixed up like a parlor?"

"I think it is necessary for them to learn that a room may be made beautiful without a large expenditure of money, and that the flowers and foliage in their own meadows are lovelier decorations than money can buy."

"You've got me there!" he admitted with a dry chuckle. "I'd have said, myself, that it would cost twenty-five dollars to fix up the schoolhouse as nice as that. Well, what's the new idea—out with it!"

"Ever since school opened I have been trying to think of a way to get the older boys and girls in the neighborhood to come. To-day one of the mothers said something which gave me my idea. She has two boys working in the factory, and she spoke of her sister's boys in

the city, who work in a shop and go to the evening high school. 'My boys are crazy to go to the city,' she said. And then it dawned on me, all in a flash, that what Rosevale needs is a night school!"

"A night school! *Night school* in the *country*! Who ever heard of such a thing?" In his amazement the old man rose and stood peering at the girl with a look of blended astonishment and disapproval. "I suppose you think this township has got money to throw away?"

"It wouldn't cost anything," Betty answered bravely, "except a little money for wood and kerosene oil. You have the school-house, the free textbooks, everything that is needed except a few oil lamps. Why should our young people be deprived of a thing they need, just because no one ever heard of a night school in the country? Maybe when folks do hear of it, there will be other townships following our example."

"I suppose you're figuring to earn some extra money teaching nights—I said you was a smart one!"

At the sneer in his voice, Betty jumped to her feet, her slim young figure drawn to its

full height, her cheeks very red, her eyes blazing.

"I don't want any money for teaching nights—and you knew that I didn't!" she cried, furiously. "I simply want to make my school useful to the community, as it should be! I suppose your mind is too narrow and cramped to comprehend that anyone could be willing to do a little extra work just for the sake of the boys and girls who are growing up here! You hate the city so. Did you ever stop to think that the boys might stay in Rosevale instead of going off to the city, if they could have advantages and opportunities right here?"

She stopped, suddenly frightened, for the old man had bent forward with his hand uplifted, his face distorted, almost livid with rage.

"Who told you anything about that?" he screamed. "Who set you up to come here and talk to me about things nobody's ever dared to mention to my face before?"

He stopped, choking and gasping for breath. His face whitened swiftly. He clutched at his breast, faltered, swayed—and Betty's arms caught him as he fell.

For an instant Betty stood, stupefied with

fright, looking down at the face so grimly drawn, so ghastly pale. Then, from somewhere down the lane, a childish voice rang out:

"Aunt Betty! where are you? Uncle Ed and Aunt Vic brought me—they're down by the road waiting for us. Oh-h! What's the matter?"

"Run back and tell them that Mr. Bennett is sick. Hurry, dear!"

When Aunt Vic and Uncle Ed came hurrying up, Betty was bending over the old man, chafing his wrists and wetting his temples with cool water.

"Here's a bottle I found on the kitchen shelf, but I was afraid to give him any of it," she said.

"Just the thing!" said Aunt Vic, after one capable sniff. "Get me a teaspoon. Hold his head, Ed—there, he swallows all right! The color's coming in his lips already. Now, Ed, we'll put him on that big lounge in the kitchen."

CHAPTER VII

BENNETT soon regained consciousness and looked dazedly from Uncle Ed to the stimulating beef tea which capable Aunt Vic had hastily prepared for him. Being waited upon was so new an experience that he found it hard to realize its reality.

Betty was far from smiling. She dropped on the steps beside Jack and buried her face in her hands.

"Don't cry any more," he begged. "He's all better now. He's sitting up, and he said, 'Where's that ambitious school ma'am?' and they said you was out here on the porch, and he said, 'Go and take her home; she's had excitement enough for one night.' 'Way back in his eyes, he looks as if he liked you, but he doesn't want anyone to know it!"

Aunt Vic, coming out just then, corroborated Jack's report.

"Everything's all right now," she said. "Come right along home. Why, child, stop your crying like that! It wasn't your fault, you know."

"I'm not crying about him," quavered Betty. "But now I know I can't have my night school. I'll never dare mention it again."

"Well, of all things!" Aunt Vic shook with laughter. "You certainly do want what you want worse than anyone I ever saw."

"And she always gets it," declared Jack confidently, as they all started down the lane. "Don't you feel so bad, Aunt Betty—'member what I told you 'bout his eyes."

"But what ever did you say to affect him like that?" Gertrude queried when, back at Blossomy Cottage, Aunt Vic and Jack had told the story, with a quiet word now and then from Uncle Ed.

"We were just discussing the night school," answered Betty, "and he toppled over all at once."

She had determined to say nothing about the sudden, mysterious agitation. She felt that, unwittingly, she had opened a close-guarded chamber in the old man's heart, and that she had no right to betray what she had glimpsed there in his moment of weakness.

"There's something she isn't telling," thought John, with the insight of his wide experience. But he said nothing except, "Cheer up, little

sister. Very often the event which seems the total end of a cherished plan proves to be its real beginning."

"But that couldn't be true in this case," thought Betty, mournfully, as she rang her school bell next morning. Then, as she noted an empty seat, "I wonder where Danny Dunning is—he never was late before."

A hand fluttered into the air importantly and, as Betty nodded, "Danny'll be here in a few minutes," explained Danny's sister. "Old Bennett stopped him and said he wanted to send a note to you and I should ask you to please excuse Danny."

"Say *Mister* Bennett," corrected Betty, while she wondered excitedly, "A note for me! What can be in it?"

She wondered still more when the note with its stiff, angular handwriting lay open before her.

"Dear Miss Ambition," she read, "if you are still so anxious to work overtime I will make no further objection. Any of my neighbors will tell you that Jim Bennett always gets all he can out of anybody who works for him, and of course I ought to do as well for the township as I would for myself. I trust you have

recovered from your little scare last evening. It was not your fault, exactly, but neither was it mine, so it may well be forgotten by both of us. I am, Very respectfully yours, James M. Bennett."

Betty's face was joyous as she read the note through the first time. The second time the joyousness softened to an expression that was almost tender.

"Poor, crabbed, unloved old man!" she breathed. "I believe there's a fine, strong character hidden away under that veneer of selfishness. He has a sense of justice and of humor, it seems. And this is not the letter of an ignorant man. I wonder—but I mustn't pry into his secrets; that last sentence is his way of asking me not to, and I won't."

"I told you so," laughed John when Betty displayed the note, at the supper table. "What seemed the end of your plan was really its beginning. And here comes our friend Bennett this minute, and he's stopping. I'll go to the door."

"No, I won't come in. What I want to say can be said in about half a minute," they heard the old man's voice; and John's answer came promptly, "O, but you must come in. You've

never called on us. A country landlord should be neighborly."

Half protesting, but plainly gratified, Bennett received their welcome in the cozy living room. His eyes widened a trifle as he glanced around the pretty room with its simple furniture, its shelves full of books, its quiet, restful colorings. Through the open door he glimpsed the daintiness of the dining room, and beyond that the kitchen floor shone freshly painted.

"I suppose this is more of your 'beauty-at-small-expense' idea," he said, eying Betty with the suspicion of a twinkle.

"Come out and advise me about my fruit trees," said John. "I'm entirely green at farming, you know."

"Well, you're learning!" was Bennett's approving comment as he viewed the result of John's out-door efforts. "You've slicked up a lot better than most experienced men would. You've got the makings of a farmer in you, young man."

"My ancestors were farmers," smiled John, stooping to straighten a broken branch, "and next spring I want to make a garden. I'll be able to raise a lot of vegetables here, won't I?"

"There's not a better garden spot in this

township, if it's taken care of right!" The old man was almost beaming. "And speaking of your farming brings me to what my errand here was. Maybe you won't like it, but then maybe you will—but you look like a fellow with common sense—and I know you're not well—and I thought you wouldn't be offended any how—and—er—"

"I'm not easily offended. Go ahead," encouraged John, inwardly amused at his crusty landlord's confusion.

"Well, maybe you've heard talk of how scarce farm help is, with all the young men piking off to the factory or the city. I've got potatoes fairly rotting in the ground for want of digging, and apples spoiling on the trees, and corn and pumpkins to be brought in and took care of—all sorts of fall work to be done. I thought maybe you'd like to come over and help me some, part of a day at a time or just as you feel able, and I'd pay you in farm stuff. Gather stuff on shares, you know. You could fill your cellar with everything you'd need all winter. Now do you want to, or don't you?"

"Do I want to? Man alive, did you ever have to idle around and eat up the little you'd saved and not know when you'd be in shape

to earn more? I don't know how to thank you!"

"Don't thank me at all," Bennett's tone was crustier than ever. "It's simply business. Come over to-morrow morning, then. Good-night."

"Now we surely will have money enough for the year," concluded John, when he told the family about Bennett's offer.

"I believe you have been worrying," reproached Gertrude.

"No, not exactly that. But I didn't like to think we had just barely enough to live a year. Now you shall have your heart's desire—brass fixings for the fireplace. And Betty's heart's desire is granted—permission to work by night as well as by day. We should be a happy family."

"I *said* Aunt Betty would get what she wanted," affirmed Jack. "And now please can I talk about what *I* want? I've been waiting and waiting for a chance, ever since I came home from Aunt Vic's this afternoon. I didn't want to tell until Aunt Betty was here."

"Out with it, young man. What's your heart's desire?" asked John, lifting Jack to a seat on his knee.

"I—I want to go to a party, at night, and stay up till twelve o'clock and have doughnuts and pumpkin pie and cider and butternuts, and help husk corn, and kiss a little girl if I find a red ear!" declared Jack, his words tumbling out in a breathless rush after the hesitating start.

"Why, Jackie-boy! Who ever put all those things into your head?" Gertrude inquired.

"Aunt Vic. They're going to have a party—a husking bee, for all the boys and girls. And Aunt Vic said of course I would come with Aunt Betty and the children. I said I wasn't ever 'lowed to stay up after eight, or eat anything at night; but Aunt Vic said I was a little country boy now, and little country boys stay up at night sometimes. And she said mummy and father would come with me and look after my eating, 'cause she wanted them to help her that night. And—and, don't you think I could go, Mummy, if I'd sleep all the afternoon before and not eat any dinner or supper?"

His brown eyes flew to Aunt Betty's, confident of her support. But, after all, it was John, still laughing, who settled it.

"I think we'll have to manage it," he said. "We couldn't refuse Aunt Vic."

"O—O!" exclaimed Betty, suddenly sitting up very straight, her eyes as round and bright as Jack's own. "That's the very thing! There's where I'll get acquainted with all those big boys and ask them to come to my classes."

"Of course," John agreed instantly. "But why big boys exclusively? Don't the girls share in this educational scheme?"

"They'll come if the boys do. Aunt Vic said so," was Betty's answer. "I must wear my prettiest frock to the party and be just as charming as I can, so they'll all want to be my pupils."

Whether it was the muslin frock with its roses matching her cheeks, or Aunt Vic's whole-hearted espousal of her cause, or Betty's frank, appealing friendliness, or a burning desire for education that touched the hearts of Rosevale's young people, may never be definitely known. Perhaps it was the combination of all these things. At any rate, Miss Betty's night school, as it was always called, was an unqualified success.

But it rapidly developed into more than a night school. To the twice-a-week classes, presided over by Betty, was soon added a class in mechanical drawing for the factory boys,

taught by a foreman in the factory. Next came a class in simple domestic science, led by Gertrude; a glee club, to which the young minister of Rosevale gladly gave his splendid voice and his gift of leadership. Then, under John's guidance, a current events club sprang into being, where all the neighborhood came to discuss the news of the world as well as their own practical problems. And with it all the Mothers' Day went merrily on, broadening its scope until it touched the life of all Rosevale.

"Looks to me as if Mr. Drake wasn't taking much vacation from his regular job of being neighborly," commented Aunt Vic, "but it seems to agree with him to neighbor Rosevale—and it certainly agrees with Rosevale!"

"Don't I see lights going every night, down to the schoolhouse?" queried Bennett, one afternoon in the early springtime when he met Betty on her way home from school.

"Yes," she assented. "Isn't it lovely? Of course the same ones don't come every night, but there's something for everyone, now. It's a shame the way the schoolhouse was wasted for so long—doing no good except to a handful of children when it should have been helping the whole community."

"Well, as long as they're chipping in to pay for their wood and kerosene, I suppose I haven't any call to complain," he admitted, grudgingly. "But what's this I hear about your wanting to fix up a playground for the young ones? All they think of now is play—they don't need any encouragement along that line. What's your idea?"

He did not realize that his willingness to make inquiry before condemning this new idea marked a long step in his own development; but Betty did, and she chose her words very carefully.

"They play now, of course. But I want them to have a chance to play in the right way. That is, to make their play useful. I want their play to develop them mentally and physically—yes, and morally."

"I'd like to know what they can learn, just playing."

"They can learn to take care of their bodies; to stand erect; to breathe full, deep breaths; to do team-work—all working together for the common good instead of each for himself! They can learn how harmful cigarettes are, or any form of intemperance. They can learn self-control, justice, unselfishness—"

"Hold on, hold on, young woman! If they learn much more, the millennium will strike Rosevale! It sounds all right, but I don't seem to grasp how they're to learn all these fine things on your playground."

"That's why I want you to come down to the schoolhouse Friday night. John has sent to the city for a stereopticon and a set of slides that show all the things we used to do on the playground at Hope House. He is going to explain all about it as the pictures are shown. You'll come, won't you?"

Throughout the long winter Bennett had persistently refused all invitations to the schoolhouse, but now he hesitated.

"Hm-m-m. I don't know about that. How do folks in general take to your idea? Most of them favor it?"

"No," Betty admitted, bravely. "I'm having hard work to convince them that a good playground and equipment for it are necessities. That's why I want you to come. If you approve of the plan after you see what it is, you'll say so and help me."

"Is that so? May I ask how you know that, Miss?"

"Anyone can see that you are a man who

will act according to his own convictions," replied Betty, quietly. "I knew that the first time I ever saw you."

She could not have chosen a better reply to the old man, who gloried in his independence of thought and action.

"I'll be there," he snapped, "but you needn't advertise my coming, in advance."

"I won't," she promised. Consequently the audience that packed the schoolhouse on Friday sat up with one united gasp, when, just at the beginning of John's talk, Bennett walked in and took the chair that Betty had saved for him beside her own.

"He's held off all winter, but he's come to it at last," was the whispered comment; and then he was forgotten as the first pictures flashed on the screen.

They were interested in John's talk; in his stories of the Hope House girls and boys; in the pictures of games, drills, folk dances, all the varied activities of the playground. But Betty, watching her audience, felt her heart sinking. They were interested, but they were glancing now and then at one another as if to say, "Very pretty—for the city!"

She sighed as John said:

"The last picture for this evening shows our star athletic team and their leader, a young man who, in spite of his rapidly growing business and financial interests, finds time to lead these boys, who idolize him as their friend and counselor."

Betty gave a little gasp. There on the screen stood James Monroe, with his boys grouped around him. His eyes seemed to be looking down, straight into hers.

She started—the lights danced unsteadily—blurred—grew dark to her—and Betty slipped from her chair and lay at James Bennett's very feet.

It was the old man himself who lifted her, easily, and faced the excited audience.

"Just a faint," he said authoritatively. "All of you sit down and keep quiet. We'll bring her back all right in a few minutes."

Outside in the cool air, Betty revived quickly. When her blue eyes opened and she began to smile again, Bennett turned away.

"I'll go in and ease their minds," he said. "Keep her out here till she feels herself. Then you'll have to bring her in for a minute to satisfy them—they're acting like a lot of idiots in there!"

When Betty reappeared Bennett lifted his hand for silence.

"I just want to say that I'm in favor of this playground business. I don't just understand yet all that Miss Betty wants for her project here; but whatever it is, she's going to have it if I have to pay every last dollar of the cost myself!"

When the storm of applause had died, when the audience had obeyed Bennett's crusty suggestion that they "hurry away so Miss Betty can go home and rest," Betty ran up to him, her cheeks rosy with excitement now, her eyes radiant.

"I don't know what to say!" she declared. "I can't ever thank you enough!"

"Don't try," he advised, gruffly. "I liked the idea and, as you said yourself, when I believe in a thing I act on my convictions. Those were good pictures. Do you happen to know the name of the young fellow that he said is the leader of those boys—the fellow in that last picture?"

To his dismay, Betty's face went suddenly white again.

"Yes," she faltered, "I know him. His name is Mr. Monroe—James Monroc."

He nodded, slowly.

"Here, take Miss Betty home," he said to John, sharply. "She's getting too tired."

As the old buggy rattled up the hill, his face in the moonlight was working strangely.

"James Monroe!" he muttered. "James Monroe! Business and financial interests—friend and counselor of poor boys! And the smartest little girl the Lord ever made fainting dead away at sight of him! Must be mulish and contrary as ever!"

CHAPTER VIII

SPRINGTIME had come to Rosevale. The meadow path was fringed with violets, the brook laughed between banks that were yellow with adder's tongue, or softly green with the tender shoots of water plants. Beyond Blossomy Cottage the hills were clothed in spring's own hues—soft grays and browns, greens and pinks, while here and there a dogwood threw out its banner of gleaming white.

“I never thought anything could be so lovely as those hills were in October, but they're just as beautiful now,” Gertrude breathed happily, coming into the garden where John was spading up the rich brown earth. “I used to think that all trees were the same color in the springtime—just plain green—but look at them! They are as varied as they were in the autumn. There's a tulip out this morning, John, and the daffodils are so saucy. My climbing rose has a lot of little new shoots and the honeysuckle vine grows two feet every day, I'm sure.”

“We are going to have the best garden in

Rosevale," declared John. "None of Aunt Vic's tomatoes for us this year! We're going to have them as big as a pint basin, and as red as—as Jack's cheeks!"

"*Isn't* he rosy and healthy?" Gertrude laughed. "You are too. That's the best of all—to have you well."

"I haven't much excuse for staying away from Hope House now on the score of health," he said, blithely; but Gertrude's face sobered. A mist blurred her eyes as she turned them to her beloved hills.

"How can we ever leave it all?" she said, impulsively. "How can we, John? Don't you think you could have just the least bit of a relapse?"

"You might do something to the cooking to induce dyspepsia," he suggested, "but don't begin to grieve. It's a long time until September. Blossomy Cottage is ours for a long, blissful summer, anyhow, and who knows what will happen by that time?"

Gertrude glanced at him sharply. There was a hint of mystery in his tones, the tiniest twinkle in the brown eyes. But before she could ask a question, Jack's voice floated out from the kitchen. "Where are you, Mummy?"

"Here, Jackie-boy," she called, "in the garden," and Jack, his cheeks scarlet from his walk along the meadow path in the warm spring sunshine, came with an offering of fragrant white violets.

"There's a big patch of them over in the meadow," he said. "Keep some for Aunt Betty—she loves sweet, smelly flowers. And see, this lovely pink blossom—wild honeysuckle Uncle Ed calls it. He got it 'way up on the hill, and he said next Saturday Aunt Betty and me could go and get lots of it. Don't you think it's awful pretty, Mummy? It's just the color Aunt Betty's cheeks used to be when we lived at Hope House."

"O, John," there was a sob in Gertrude's voice, "even Jack can see the change in Betty—she *is* pale and—"

"She has worked very hard," John interrupted, seeing the shocked wonder in Jack's eyes. "When school closes, next week, she will have a nice long rest and then you'll see her rosy cheeks coming back. Think of all that she has done this last winter, and now her precious playground and her preparations for the exhibition are taking her energy. No wonder she looks pale."

"I couldn't go up to the schoolhouse and see her a little while, could I?" Jack asked, wistfully. "It's just recess time, and I'd come right home when Aunt Betty rings the bell."

"Yes, run along," consented Gertrude, somewhat to John's surprise. Going to the schoolhouse was a rare treat, kept for special reward of merit.

"I worried him—can't you see? He just wants to see her with his own eyes and know she is all right," Gertrude explained, as Jack ran off joyously. "It is wonderful how he loves her, and how he seems to read her moods better than we older folk do. I don't know how Betty ever would live without him, now that she is so unhappy. Sometimes I almost hate James Monroe!"

"You'd better pity him, instead," John advised, soberly. "I saw him last week, when I went into the city; and if ever a man looked miserable, he did."

"He ought to!" flashed Gertrude. "I don't know what they quarreled about, but I don't believe it was Betty's fault! She loved him."

"Yes, she loves him, but she always has had her own way—and she's got a Bancroft chin," John teased, trying to laugh away Gertrude's

real anxiety. "Just wait. Things will come out all right. Hark! what's that?"

"It's Jack!" gasped Gertrude. "O John, he must be hurt terribly!"

Jack was sobbing, great, strangled, shuddering sobs, as he stumbled up the path toward Gertrude's outstretched arms. His face was ghostly white, his eyes were dilated with a look they never had held before, a look of terrible fright and pain.

"O Daddy, go—run!" he gasped. "Two of Aunt Betty's big boys are carrying her home—she's clear dead, I think. She can't open her eyes and every one of the children are crying and she's all limp and white—"

"Hush, Jack!" John said, rallying his own senses sharply. "Gertrude dear, you mustn't give way now. Run and get Betty's bed ready for her. Probably she has fainted and the children are frightened, of course."

Saved from utter panic by the need for action, Gertrude ran indoors, while John placed a firm hand under Jack's chin, turning the white, distorted little face up to meet his eyes.

"Listen, son," he said. "We must be brave, so we can help Aunt Betty. Perhaps it is not

very bad, after all, and anyhow we cannot help her unless we are quiet and steady. There, that's father's man. Go now and pump a little pail of cool water and take it up to Mummy. She will need it."

So John managed to meet the sad little procession alone and bear the first brunt of the news himself.

"O Mr. Drake, Mr. Drake!" sobbed the wild-eyed boy who came first. "I done it—I done it myself! I batted the ball, and it went foul and struck her in the head. O I've kilt Miss Betty—I wish it was me that was hurt. I'd have died before I'd hurt her!"

The two who carried Betty were ashen white. Boys and girls alike, trailing dismally up to the gate, were sobbing aloud. Quickly, John took the limp figure in his own arms and bent his ear to her breast for an instant.

"She isn't dead," he said, calmly, lifting his head. "Don't blame yourself so, Bob. We all know it wasn't your fault. Now, Bob, run for Doctor Wylie. Take Tom and Ned with you, so that you can scatter and find him in case he is not at home. Ben may sit here on the piazza, in case we need another errand done; and all the rest of you who want to wait to hear what

the doctor says, go across the road there in the shade of the big maple and wait quietly."

"Send one of the boys for Aunt Vic," Gertrude said, as John laid Betty in her bed.

"She's gone to the city with Uncle Ed," Jack said, his wide, piteous eyes never leaving Betty's face as he knelt beside her. "They were just starting when I was over there. They won't be home till night."

"And Doctor Wylie is only a boy, just out of college!" cried Gertrude. "Will he know what to do, John? I'm so afraid he isn't equal to this!"

It was an echo of John's own thought, but he tried to conceal his anxiety.

"He will do his best and we must have faith," he comforted. "After all, she may only be stunned. There—the boys must have found Wylie at home. He's coming on a dead run. Good fellow—he'll do his best."

He did his best, indeed, clear-eyed and steady-handed, working over the apparently lifeless form until fifteen long, torturing minutes had dragged away. When he turned and faced John it would have been hard to say which of the four faces in the room was whitest.

"Mr. Drake," he said, steadily, "the only right thing for me to do is to say, before it is too late, that I can't handle this case. She's fearfully hurt—there's a concussion and there must be an operation. It is too delicate and dangerous a thing for me, with my little experience, to attempt alone. It's got to be done mighty quick, too. Three hours from now it will be too late."

"Can we get any one here?" John asked. "Where can we send quickest?"

"There's only one man that can make the thing sure," Wylie answered hesitantly. "That's Doctor Benson, in the city."

"The famous Benson!" John exclaimed. "He wouldn't come, would he? His price is enormous and I haven't the money. Isn't there anyone else?"

"O, John," Gertrude was shaken with great dry sobs that tore the hearts of the men who watched, helpless. "Can't we manage some way? There must be a way. Wouldn't some of the folks who knew us at Hope House help us?"

"If there was time," John groaned. "But three hours—how can I get in touch with them, or anyone, in that time! Don't cry so, dear.

I'm trying to think of a way. If only Uncle Ed was at home, he'd help us."

In the excitement, none of them saw Jack's face lift and a light leap to the blue eyes, as he tilted his head, listening intently. No one noticed when he stole from the room and ran lightly down the stairs, out to the roadside, where he waved his hands frantically at the old man who was passing in his rattling buggy.

"Mr. Bennett, Mr. Bennett, stop, quick! I want you!" he screamed. "Aunt Betty is hurted, just awful. A ball hit her in the head."

The old man was on the ground beside Jack, instantly.

"She's got to have a big doctor from the city, in three hours, or she won't ever wake up," Jack went on, "and daddy hasn't got the money to pay him, and Uncle Ed is away, and Mummy is crying awful. I heard your buggy rattling along, and I just ran as fast as I could. I knew you'd help us. You've got money enough to pay the big doctor all he wants, haven't you?"

There was a world of eager confidence in the child's uplifted face. No one would have recognized Jim Bennett's harsh voice as he answered that trustful appeal.

"You bet I have, sonny! Where's your daddy?"

"Upstairs in Aunt Betty's room. Let's hurry."

To the anxious group around the bed came Jack's voice, vibrant with joyous hope: "It's all right, Mummy, don't cry any more. Mr. Bennett's going to get the big doctor-man."

They turned, with one impulse of surprise, to see Bennett. He came into the room, moving straight toward the unconscious figure on the dainty bed, his eyes seeing nothing but the white face.

For a tense, silent moment, he stood looking down at her. Then he whirled, so sharply that they caught their breaths, startled.

"Well, who's the man that's needed?" he snapped. "How we going to get him here? Know his address? Know his telephone number?"

Before answer could be made: "I've got it! What's the address of that Monroe fellow—the one you had the picture of, helping you with the boys? Has he got an automobile?"

"Yes, he has a car," John began, with a look of hope.

But Gertrude cried indignantly, "We won't

ask him for help. Betty wouldn't want us to. She's proud, and he broke her heart. He's nothing to us. We can't ask him to bring a thousand-dollar specialist out here."

Even in Gertrude's bitter grief and anxiety, the Bancroft chin lifted proudly.

"That's all right, ma'am," Bennett said grimly. "I'm the person that's doing the asking. I've got money enough to do the act, as far as that goes, but there's got to be some mighty quick work done to get in touch with that doctor and get him here. I reckon that if I can talk to that young fellow a minute, he'll do the rest. He'll find that doctor and he'll get him here, regardless of roads, or speed limits, or the old boy himself! Won't nothing stop him when he starts to do a thing—he won't be stopped—just like a young mule!"

"You know him?" cried John and Gertrude together.

"Know him?" repeated the old man with a dry chuckle. "I reckon I know him better'n anybody else does. He's my son, James Monroe Bennett, that's who *he* is! Now will you give me his telephone number and quit wasting time?"

Half an hour of the precious time had flown

when Bennett, in the telephone booth of the village drug store, called "Cortland 1-7-4-7."

"Yes, this is Mr. Monroe's office," came an assured, feminine voice, in answer to his inquiry, "but he is in an important meeting of his directors. No, I couldn't possibly call him. If you'll leave your number—"

"Young woman," the tone was savagely compelling, "there's no time here for argument. This is a matter of life and death. You tell James Monroe that his father wants to speak to him—and tell him quick."

There was silence for several minutes. Then came a voice, a man's voice, full of irritated amazement.

"Hello, hello! What's all this about? Who are you?"

"I'm your father, that's who I am. Now don't waste words and time, you young scamp. That girl Betty—know who I mean?"

"Yes, yes." The tone was all impatient eagerness now. "Go on—hurry."

"She's been hurt—hit with a baseball—brain concussion. We've got to have that Doctor Benson, and have him quick. Know where to get hold of him?"

"Yes, if he isn't out on some case. What if

he is—if I can't find him—won't any one else do?"

"You find him and you get him out here, that's your job!" roared the old man. "And mind you come with him, so he don't lose himself. You know the shortest way to this place. Know where their Blossomy Cottage is?"

"Yes."

"Well, then get your man and come on. It's a race with time. If you don't get here, the girl dies, that's all. Good-by."

The receiver clicked up. For an instant James Monroe sat staring dazedly at his own telephone. Then he seized his hat and raced for the elevator. "Going down!" he yelled.

CHAPTER IX

THE china clock on the pink and white dressing table ticked the minutes away, steadily. An hour passed, and Gertrude's face, grown years older in those sixty minutes, pressed itself against the window pane, her eyes straining down the white road.

Jack left his place by the bedside to stroke her hair. "Don't be 'fraid," he pleaded. "I'm sure the big doctor-man will get here. And, Mummy, Mr. Monroe must stand right here with me where Aunt Betty can see him the minute they get her head fixed, so she can open her eyes."

"Why, Jackie-boy?" John asked.

"'Cause when Aunt Betty sees him, her cheeks will get all pinky-rose, and then she'll get well right away!" the child explained, happily.

The group under the big maple were waiting, patiently. Not one of the children would leave, until they could hear the result of the "big doctor's" visit.

"I'm going to take them out a jar full of cookies," Gertrude said, rising suddenly. "Betty wouldn't want them to be hungry."

"That's good," approved John, welcoming anything that would divert her mind for even a moment from that colorless face against the pillows.

When she came back, her eyes were shining through their tears.

"John," she said, brokenly, "do you know all the women for a mile around are down in our yard, waiting? They've just left their work and come! And there are seven men out in the garden with Mr. Bennett, with their eyes fairly glued to the road, watching. O, surely she will get well! She couldn't help it, when everybody loves her so. Surely, he will come in time!"

"There!" cried Jack, his eyes dark with excitement, "hear it, Mummy—hear the car coming?"

Far down the road a cloud of yellow dust was whirling swiftly nearer. The steady drone of a motor was swelling into a whizzing roar. Out of the cloud sprang a huge gray car, speeding up to the gate to stop with noisome panting.

In the garden, Bennett was nodding in grim satisfaction.

“Knew he’d make it—the young scamp!” he said; and his voice choked oddly.

CHAPTER X

THE children waited silently under the big maple; the women waited silently on the porch; and in the garden the men paced silently up and down the neat paths.

Jim Bennett had given one quick glance toward the tall figure which leaped from the gray car and followed the doctor up the path and through the door where John Drake stood waiting; then he had whirled and stood leaning on the garden fence, gazing across the meadows with eyes which saw nothing of the fresh grass pushing sturdily through the brown earth, the yellow heads of the dandelions or the fluttering activities of robins and bluebirds.

There was a step beside him, a warm little hand slipped into his and a pair of brown eyes looked up from a fringe of red-gold hair.

"Father told me to come and tell you that we are all waiting in Mummy's room while the big doctor-man fixes Aunt Betty's head. He won't let anybody come in only Doctor Wylie.

Mummy is 'fraid yet—she just cries and cries, but I'm not—I know Aunt Betty will wake up; she just couldn't stay asleep when Mr. Monroe is here."

"Well, well! How do you know that, young man?" There was a twinkle in Bennett's eyes now, in spite of his gnawing anxiety.

"O, I know all 'bout Aunt Betty! I know what makes her cry so much since we came out here, and why her cheeks never get pinky-rose now—it's 'cause Mr. Monroe wouldn't come to Blossomy Cottage ever."

"Why wouldn't he come?"

"I don't know that. But one night just a little while after we came here I went in to her room to s'prise her with some flowers I had found, and she was on her bed crying awful hard, and she didn't even see me. She had Mr. Monroe's picture in her hand, and she was saying right out loud, 'O won't you ever come to Blossomy Cottage?' and I went out and shut the door and I never told anybody 'cause I knew if Aunt Betty wanted us to know she'd tell us herself."

"You've got a heap more judgment than most grown folks," was Bennett's comment.

"I must go back, 'cause they might want

me." He jumped to the ground, shook back the red-gold curls and nodded reassuringly. "Don't you worry a speck," he said. "I'll come running out pretty soon to tell you she's waked up."

James Bennett watched the little figure go slowly across the garden, stopping to say a word of childish encouragement to each man as he passed. Then he turned back to lean on the fence again and gaze across the meadows. Would the child's confidence be justified? Would Aunt Betty "wake up"—and if she did what would happen? Would he hear her call him father? Never in all his seventy years had James Bennett longed for anything so ardently as he now longed to hear Betty's voice say "Father" to him!

But his son—this tall prosperous stranger-son—it all lay with him. Would he turn Betty's heart away from the father and the old farm which he had left in such hot anger? Would he spin away in that gray car, never to return to the Rosevale whose dust he had shaken from his feet fifteen long, dragging years ago? Would he come out to him in the garden? Suddenly James Bennett knew that even above his desire to hear Betty say

“Father” was the desire to hear his son, his own-blood son, say “Father” again!

All this time James Monroe stood in an upper window of the cottage, looking out across the garden, across the meadows, across the rambling range of hills, with eyes which saw nothing, least of all the figure of the old man leaning on the garden fence. In his heart there was no room for fathers, no room for boyhood associations, no room even for the girl-mother whose gentle presence might have fluttered back to him now in the familiar scenes. There was room only for Betty—Betty, over whose white, lifeless form he had bent for one agonized instant, before the doctors had forced him from the room.

Try as he would, he could not call up the vision of the rose-cheeked, shining-eyed Betty who had haunted his dreams, sleeping and waking, through the long months of their separation. He could see nothing but that death-like face on the pillows, with the white lids hiding the shining eyes. Would they ever lift again, to let the soul of Betty look out at him? He caught his breath with a groan, forgetting Gertrude, for whose sake they were all trying to preserve a cheerful front of confidence.

Instantly, Jack, just returning from his tour of encouragement downstairs, was by his side, looking up at him gravely.

"You mustn't!" he said. "Men must be brave—father said so!"

The door of Betty's room opened and Doctor Wylie came out, closing it carefully behind him. "It's all right, Mrs. Drake," he said. "It is perfectly all right. I wouldn't come out to you until he was dead sure."

"Has she waked up?" demanded Jack, eagerly. No one else in the room could have found his voice at that instant.

"Not yet, but she will in a very few minutes."

"I can go in?" Gertrude asked. "I must be with her when she opens her eyes."

Doctor Wylie hesitated and his eyes sent an appealing message to John.

"We can run no slightest chance of exciting her, of giving her even an instant's uneasiness," he said. "If she can open her eyes on a familiar, loved face, feel reassured and fall quietly asleep, all danger will be past. Doctor Benson thinks that Jack had better stand beside her."

But the red-gold curls shook with a decided gesture of disapproval. "I want to see her

wake up so bad that I can't hardly give it up," he said, "but that isn't the way. You see, I know Aunt Betty better than the doctor-man does. I know who she's got to see when she opens her eyes. It's Mr. Monroe. When she looks at him, she'll be all right."

"O no, that would excite her," John said, but Jack's eyes flashed scornful contempt at this suggestion.

"'Scuse me, father, but you don't know like I do!" he declared. "I tell you Aunt Betty's been a-watching and a-watching for him for months and months, and every night she cried herself to sleep 'cause he wasn't here. Now, when she sees him she will just go right to sleep without crying—can't you see?"

"He's right!" cried Gertrude with a flash of understanding. "I'm sure of it. No one ever understood Betty as Jackie-boy does."

So Jackie-boy's judgment prevailed, and when the white lids quivered and the long lashes lifted to let the soul of Betty look out through its blue, shining windows again, it looked straight through a pair of darkly gray eyes into the strong, loving, remorseful heart of James Monroe. For an instant she stared, bewildered, like a child coming back from

dreamland; then the light leaped to her eyes, a faint, faint rose flushed her cheeks, a tiny ghost of a smile fluttered her lips.

“O!” she whispered faintly. “You’ve come! You’ve come to Blossomy Cottage!”

Then, with her two hands close-folded in a strong, tender clasp, Betty drifted into a quiet sleep, while the “big doctor-man,” his face alight with something more than the glow of accomplishment, went softly from the room.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Jack's face and voice spread the news, those who had waited went home with thankful hearts—all except the old man who leaned on the garden fence. He still stood there, waiting, with a look of tense anxiety which puzzled Jack very much.

"Aunt Betty's all right, now," he persisted. "Aren't you glad?"

"Yes, yes, sonny," but still the old eyes held their anxious look. "Where's—where's that young fellow who came with the doctor?"

"He's sitting by the bed and the big doctor-man is going to stay here till after Aunt Betty wakes up again."

There was a long silence. The child knew that all was not well with the old man. Impulsively he laid his chubby hand on the wrinkled one which hung within reach. "You couldn't tell me what's the matter, could you?" he ventured. "It feels better to tell somebody when you hurt so in your feelings. I always tell Mummy, but you haven't got any Mummy or any little boys or anybody."

"But I have a little boy—at least I had one once; he has grown up now!" James Bennett stopped in sheer amazement. After all these long, silent years, he was actually speaking of his heart's sore secret to this youngster who looked up at him with wide, sympathetic eyes, his brow puckered in a childish frown.

"Where is he?" Jack went straight to the root of the matter.

A pause—and James Bennett took the plunge, wondering at himself as he did so.

"He's upstairs. It is your Mr. Monroe. He is my boy."

"Oh-h-h!" The childish wonder was so plainly apparent that Bennett went on. "You see, sonny, we quarreled, long years ago, and he went away. He swore he never would come back, and he never did! He kept his word."

The man's voice broke, and Jack's hold on the wrinkled hand tightened.

"But he's come back now, so it is all right," he said.

"Ah! But he came to see your Aunt Betty—not to see his old father. And when she wakes up, maybe he will get in the big car and go away, without coming out in the garden to see me at all. Can't you see, boy"—how wonder-

fully he was unfolding under the grasp of the little fingers!—"that's what I'm afraid of—that he won't come out to meet me—he said he never would, and he's stubborn as a young mule!"

For an instant Jackie-boy stared. Then he spoke, simply but emphatically. "Why, then you must go in and see him, of course," he said.

"Go in to see him! Give in to him!" The man's form stiffened. "I guess not! I said I never would."

Jack's face took on a look of baffled bewilderment. Truly, the ways of grown-ups were inexplicable, but once more he plunged to the heart of the tangle. "I see," he said slowly. "He's as stubborn as a young mule and you're as stubborn as an old one! I 'spect that's 'cause you're his father and he's your little boy—you *have* to be just alike, don't you?"

Suddenly, to Jackie-boy's complete mystification, James Bennett threw back his head with a ringing laugh. "You're the smartest young one in nineteen States!" he declared. "On my word of honor, I hadn't thought of that—I never even thought as I *could* give in! Just alike, are we? Young mule and an old one? Well, I'll be Bob-whizzled!"



- FRANK R. SOUTHARD '15

"He's as stubborn as a young mule and you're as stubborn as an old one!"

On the little porch Aunt Vic and Uncle Ed, just back from the city, were listening to Gertrude's story of the day's events while John and Doctor Wylie and the big doctor-man helped out with explanations.

"And to think that young Jim Bennett is back after all these years—and that he's Betty's sweetheart," said Aunt Vic. "Don't things work around queer? Ed, do you suppose that the old man and him will make up?"

"No," said Uncle Ed, with his quiet positiveness, "not now, anyhow. Maybe Betty can bring them around in the course of time, but it will be a hard job. They're too much alike in disposition."

Around the corner of the house came Jackie, clinging tightly to the hand of James Bennett.

"Mummy," he said, "Mr. Bennett's going up in your room with me to wait till Mr. Monroe comes out of Aunt Betty's room. You don't care, do you?"

"No, indeed. I'm sure Mr. Bennett is very tired and needs to rest after his worry and trouble in getting the doctor for us." How John blessed the quick perception and tactfulness which enabled Gertrude to speak so easily and naturally!

"Thank you, ma'am," was the old man's only remark as he followed Jack quietly up the stairs.

It was Aunt Vic who broke the silence. "A little child shall lead them," she quoted softly, wiping her eyes.

Twenty minutes afterward Jack came down the stairs and out on the piazza where he flew into Gertrude's arms and buried his face against her shoulder. When he lifted his head, the brown eyes were blinking bravely.

"She's awake, and I saw her just a weenty minute, and Mr. Monroe came out where Mr. Bennett is, and—and—I didn't know that big men ever cried and hugged each other just like ladies," he said.

Doctor Benton hurried up the stairs. "No, please don't come until I call," he told Gertrude, so they were all waiting when James Monroe Bennett, Senior, came down arm in arm with James Monroe Bennett, Junior.

In the storm of questionings about Betty's awakening, there was no time nor chance for embarrassment.

"She's coming out splendidly," said Doctor Benson, reappearing. "Doctor Wylie can handle the case all right from now on. She

will need a long rest, and, when she is strong enough, a change of scene."

"I announce right now," said James Monroe Bennett, Junior, "that Blossomy Cottage is going to have a wedding in June, after which Betty will go for her change of scene. That baseball ended the term of Betty's bondage. Her school teaching days are over. You needn't shake your head, nor tilt your chin like that, Gertrude, for Betty whispered, 'Yes, I'll give in, now you've come to Blossomy Cottage,' just before I came downstairs."

"This is a great day for givin' in," commented Bennett senior; and in the laugh which followed Aunt Vic was the only one who did not join. Her face was sober as she said, "Then you'll all be leaving us. Blossomy Cottage will be empty and Rosevale will be just as it used to be before you came."

There was a little sobbing wail from Gertrude. "Don't!" she cried. "I can't bear it! How can we ever leave Blossomy Cottage?"

Instantly, John's arm was around her comfortingly; but his eyes sought those of the old man who was watching him as if mutely imploring some great boon. After a moment John spoke,

"Don't cry, Gertrude. I was just going to tell you something, this morning, when Jack came screaming about the accident. Now I'd like to tell it while we all can discuss it together. We needn't leave Blossomy Cottage at all. We can live here always if we wish to, or think it best to."

"O, John! O, father!" The radiance of the child-face and the mother-face as they were lifted to John's almost unnerved him for a moment.

"You know I've been working for Mr. Bennett this year," he said. "Yesterday he told me that if I will stay here and work with him, my future as a successful farmer is assured. He will make it all possible for me. With new machinery and modern methods, the Bennett farm will be the best one in the State. Now, what do you think about it?"

"O, it would be heavenly!" cried Gertrude. "We'd never have to go back to the city." But her face fell, suddenly, and she turned questioning eyes toward John.

"I forgot about Hope House," she faltered. "Ought we to give up the neighborhood work? You did so much good there—it seems wicked to desert those poor people. And yet, if we go

back, you may get sick again. How can we know what is right?"

"You see how it is," John said to them all. "I want to stay—but ought I to turn my back on the work I was trying to do?"

Aunt Vic suddenly rose to her feet, and stood regarding the group with a queer little smile.

"Now you listen to your Aunt Vic," she said, placidly, "and don't take such a one-sided look at things. Of course I don't doubt that you did a big, noble work in the city; but what have you been a-doing right here? What was Rosevale before you come to it, compared with what it is now? Who started our night school and our clubs and our neighborhood parties and all the rest of the things? Who smoothed out all the petty quarrels in the neighborhood and filled folks' minds so full of useful and elevatin' things that they didn't have time for spitework? Who's keepin' our boys and girls busy and happy and out of mischief? I tell you there's plenty of neighborhood work, as you call it, to be done right here. Country folks need help same's city folks do. You stay right here in Rosevale—it's your duty to."

"O, John dear!" Gertrude's cry was trem-

bling between joy and doubt. "Do you think it is as Aunt Vic says? Could such a lovely, lovely thing as staying here be a duty?"

"It's queer how hard it is to realize that a thing needn't be bad because it's attractive, or good because it's unpleasant," said Aunt Vic. "I never could see why things shouldn't be right *and* pleasant, instead of always right *or* pleasant."

"Vic, you always did have common sense," was Bennett's commendation. "Well, then, you'll stay, will you, John and Gertrude?"

"We'll stay," said John, drawing Gertrude and Jack into the circle of his arms. "We will stay right here and do our best for the farm and for Rosevale and for Blossomy Cottage."

